

## PHONICS GETS ENGLISH CALL

Dec 15 2005

Sally Williams, Western Mail Newspaper, Wales

THE phonics system for teaching children to read and which is being used in England was pioneered in a Welsh school.

England's Education Minister announced that the phonics system, which teaches pupils to recognise the sounds of individual letters, and then blends of letters - such as sh, th and ee - is to be used in schools there.

In Wales, there is no Assembly Government-led literacy strategy, meaning schools choose local strategies to follow.

Windsor Clive Infant school, in the heart of one of Cardiff's most deprived areas, has been using the synthetic phonics system since 1996 - and has been internationally recognised for its work.

Education Minister Jane Davidson has visited the school which has hosted advanced training courses in phonics for teachers and has attracted international visitors who are also keen to see how successful it can be in.

Headteacher Vicky Meadows says she is pleased that Government is advocating the use of the phonics system and believes it essential all teachers know it thoroughly.

But she is concerned the Government should adopt the best programme at the outset - which in her opinion is synthetic phonics, using a natural synthesis approach.

"The Government is on the threshold of this and it needs to be sure it adopts the right method, to avoid wasting £8m and 10 years in time, on what could be an educational catastrophe.

"Starting off using the wrong method could be costly and could involve a difficult process of 'unlearning'.

"The Government needs a better understanding of phonics and the training involved to get teachers signing up to the International Phonetic Alphabet.

"All our teachers are trained to an advanced level, with funds paid out of our own budget, in the Teaching, Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills Thrass system.

Mrs Meadows said, "The reason this system is better is because it teaches children that there are multiple spelling choices.

"It doesn't teach them that the letter 'c' is for cat. It teaches them that the letter 'c' can go out on a playing field and can take up different positions - and it can also sound like 'ss' as in ice and city.

### **The sound of letters**

So what is the synthetic phonic learning system?

Synthetic phonics teaches letter sounds very rapidly and children are explicitly shown how to blend the sounds together to pronounce unfamiliar words.

Children can push magnetic letters together, to help them understand how letter sounds can be blended together to pronounce the words and to reinforce blending for reading.

An Estyn Inspection in January, 2002, said, Windsor Clive Infant school in Ely " adopted methods for teaching phonological knowledge enable most pupils to tackle unfamiliar words confidently and to acquire a good range of sight reading words."

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Alan Davies from Chester 09:54:36 15 December 2005

Congratulations to Sally Williams on the article 'Phonics Gets English Call', relating to the implementation of the THRASS literacy programme at Windsor Clive Infant School, Cardiff. Make no mistake, Vicky Meadows, Headteacher, is right that the Government needs to make sure that ALL new and existing teachers are able to use the International Phonetic Alphabet (the pronunciation system used in the front of dictionaries). Windsor Clive Infants has been doing ground-breaking stuff, in terms of developing and improving teacher subject knowledge for the 44 sounds of English and the 120 main spelling choices. Despite my strong recommendation to visit the school, Jim Rose, head of the Rose Review in England, is yet to visit any THRASS school in Wales, preferring to concentrate on the widely-reported findings from Clackmannanshire, Scotland. Time will prove that he was mistaken to not first visit Wales before producing his interim report on the teaching of Synthetic Phonics.